



Town of Ashland

Center of the Universe

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October 5, 2017

Ashland Citizens, Friends, Neighbors and Community Members,

Yesterday, we launched a website (www.savedowntownashland.org) enabling residents to easily add their comments into the public record of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). We are at a critical moment in the DC2RVA process, and your voices are needed to keep the trench or a third surface track out of Ashland.

The Town Council is recommending the western bypass as the preferred alternative from the three remaining least objectionable alternatives. I would like to explain how we reached this decision, and to clear up some confusion in the community. Here are some of statements we most often hear:

Why didn't the Town try to work with our county neighbors to come up with a better alternative?

We've been working with them for more than a year. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed specifically to bring together the people most affected by the proposed routes. The group examined two dozen alternatives – east, west and through town. In the end, the committee could not recommend a final alternative, because all of the options are harmful. Therefore, they brought forward the three “least objectionable,” which was the trench option, a modified western bypass option, and the 3-2-3 option.

Why can't the Town work with our neighbors now?

We are at the end of a state-mandated process that neither the Town nor the County control. The public comment period closes next month, and then the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) will make its recommendation about the Ashland area at its December meeting. After that, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will issue its decision. The town has not stopped searching for a new solution, or ways to fight the process. We have even suggested a few creative solutions that move and contain the rail within the Town limits to DRPT since the CAC process concluded. But for now, it is imperative that we do everything we can to keep the trench out of downtown Ashland, and the public comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is our most powerful way to do that.

Why can't the Town oppose the trench, but not endorse the western bypass?

There are two reasons. First, state representatives made it clear that simply saying “No” is ineffective, particularly for the impact that the public comment record will have on the final decision. Second, the group that represents our western neighbors,

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Families Under the Rail (FUTR), publicly announced on September 7 that people should support the trench in their public comments on the DEIS, before the Community Advisory Committee even held its last meeting. At the very least, it is imperative that we “cancel out” any pro-trench comments already submitted in the public record during the 4 weeks of FUTR’s encouragement.

Is the 3-2-3 really a dead option? Why should CSX control everything?

CSX owns the rail lines, and publicly stated they will attempt to “veto” this option because they believe it negatively impacts on-time performance of freight deliveries. The 3-2-3 is also worrisome for the Town because it kicks the can down the road to a future date when significantly more rail traffic will clog the rail lines. If the CTB and FRA choose this option, in the near term it will be much better for the town as compared to the Trench and Third Rail options, but will likely leave a longer term unmet rail capacity that future generations will be forced to address.

The trench will just be an inconvenience for the Town during construction. 24 homes will be lost if the western bypass is built.

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation has identified 1 residence impacted by the chosen bypass alternative (AWB1): [DC2RVA CAC WesternBypass ProsConsList.pdf](#). There are many other landowners affected, but as we have stated before, people’s lives are dramatically impacted no matter where it goes. It is wrong to characterize the trench construction as an “inconvenience” to the Town. The price to be paid are the lives of people who could never anticipate that their choice to live and work in Ashland would mean a 5-10 year massive construction project right outside their door. The 3 years of construction suggested by the state is completely unrealistic. Recently, Amtrak showed us its latest designs to rebuild the Ashland station platform to make it ADA compliant. They anticipate at least *two years* of construction, just to improve a 300-foot platform. Businesses will be lost, possibly for decades, in the years preceding, during and after construction of a trench. Entire childhoods will be spent with a temporary road and fence only feet from front porches. Property values will plummet immediately. Moreover, we do not gain a park; we just lose the economic benefits of the trains. No one’s lives, livelihoods or futures are less important because of their choice of where to call home. For more information about the trench impacts based on documentation and comments provided by the DRPT: <https://youtu.be/32d7cPqsyuI> .

The tracks should be kept in the current right-of-way. Ashland prides itself on being a train town, after all.

The width of the right-of-way in Ashland is the same as it's been since the railroad was built 180 years ago. It is a tiny fraction of the width of the standard railroad right-of-way today, because the town was literally built on top of the tracks. To shoehorn a third track on the surface or dig a trench within that right-of-way would threaten all of our historic structures along the tracks, as well as kill our downtown's economy.

Won't supporting the Western Bypass just serve to split the community?

The residents of the Town, and the residents of the County should not look upon one another with contempt. The strategy and decision to support the Western Bypass rests solely on the shoulders of the Town Council, based on the overwhelming feedback we received from our citizens on the devastating impact any option through Town would have on their homes, businesses and lives. As elected representatives of the Town of Ashland; the Council felt they were left with only one realistic option that would not destroy the lives and livelihoods of those they represent.

It is important to point out that there are no villains here. We are all victims of a federal project that – despite the necessity to increase rail capacity in the coming decades – has created this situation where we are forced to choose between two devastating alternatives. We are at this point *despite* everyone's passionate efforts not to be. In the end, Town Council has a responsibility to the citizens who elected us. We have to be able to look our residents in the eye and say, "We did everything possible to protect you and your investments in our town."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JRF', is positioned to the left of a vertical dotted line.

James R. Foley
Mayor
Town of Ashland, VA
The Center of the Universe